

Communication, negotiation and consultation

Negotiation involves discussion to make agreements where the parties involved have some difference of interest or simply negotiation of how a task or project will be carried out. Consultation involves talking to interested parties both to explain developments and issues and in order to canvas their views and ideas that they can contribute.

Typically negotiation involves a greater level of democracy in decision making than consultation. In a negotiation there may be considerable uncertainty about what the outcome will be. In contrast managers who consult their employees may already have decided the core of what they intend to do from the outset.

Employer/employee relations

Negotiation and consultation are an important part of employer/employee relations in the workplace. Managers will negotiate with trade unions and with individual employees over work related issues. Consultation is an important aspect of any type of change that managers are thinking about introducing.

Consultation and negotiation are both indicative of a greater level of industrial democracy in Britain today than in the past. They represent a move away from the old 'tell and do' approach to management to one of 'involve and consult'.

Negotiations will take place in a workplace over pay and conditions, and about new working practices.

Consultative exercise

Consultation will take place when managers want to introduce changes (large and small) and when they want to find out the opinions of 'grass roots' employees about management actions. When managers wish to change existing practice they may carry out a consultative exercise to find out 'what are the main strengths and weaknesses of the existing system' and 'what approaches could be employed for changing the system'.